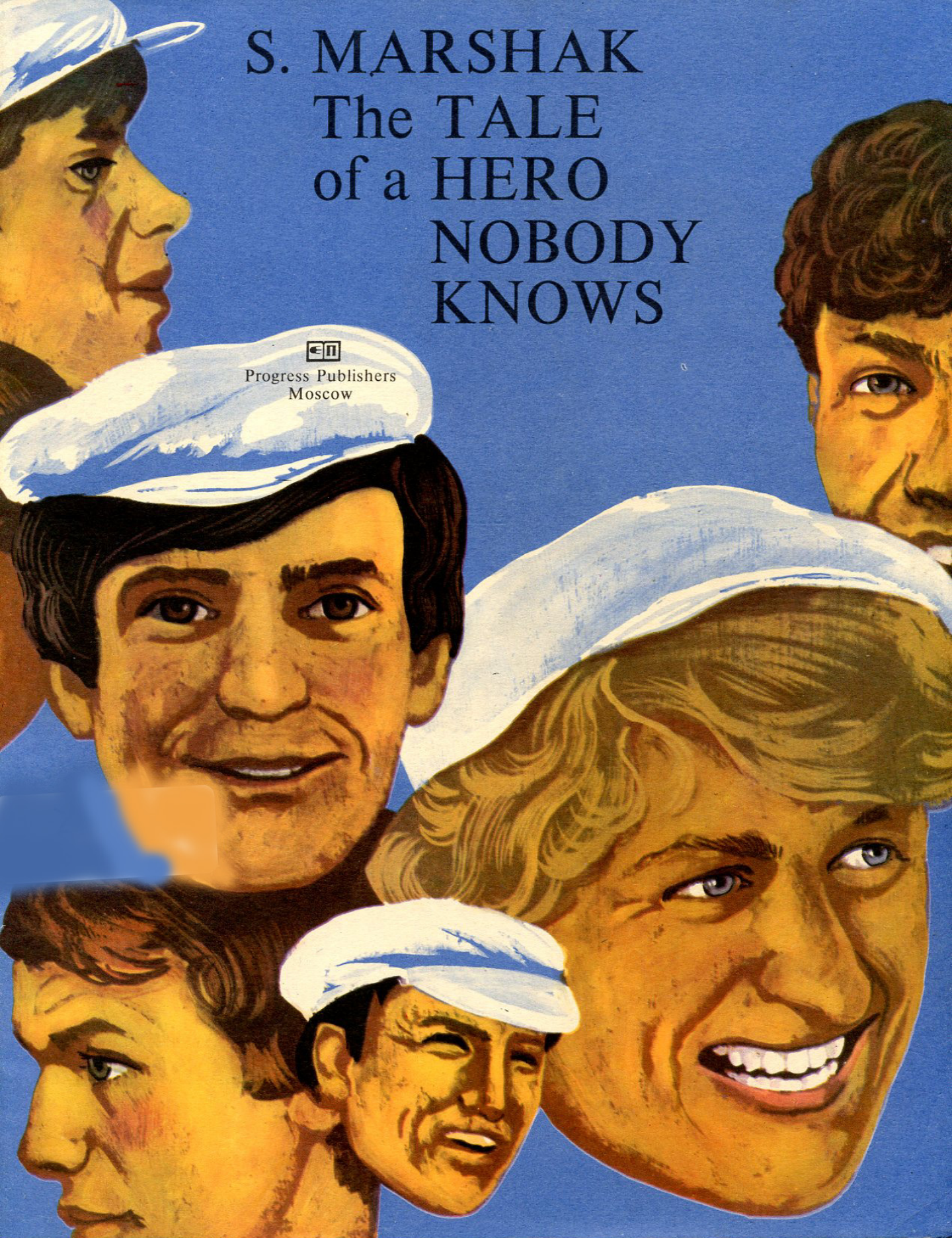
S. MARSHAK
The TALE of a HERO NOBODY KNOWS

Progress Publishers
Moscow



ПРИ ПОЖАРЕ
01
ОВОЩИ-ФРУКТЫ
БУЛОЧНАЯ
5
1234

Where can he be?
They are scouring the city–
Reporters, photographers,
Firemen, militia...
Seeking
So far without any success
Someone who's twenty, they
say,
At a guess.

Height about average,
Broad-shouldered, sturdy,
Wearing a white cap,
A light summer jersey,
A badge too for sports–
"Fit for Work and Defence"...
That's all they know about him–
Nothing else!

So many fellows there are
Broad and sturdy,
All wearing white caps
And light summer jerseys,
All wearing badges
For sports excellence
Showing
Their fitness
For work and defence.

Who is
This fellow
Of whom
We are speaking?
What sort of lad
Is the whole city seeking?

What has he done
That he has to be found?
Here is the story
That's going around:

Down a broad boulevard
One day in spring
Rode a young lad
On a tram.
Ting-a-ling!
Loud rang the tram bell,
The wheels were tum-tumming.
Out on the platform
The young lad
Was humming...

On a high window
His gaze fell by chance.
Fire, smoke,
A terrified face
Met his glance.

Down on the pavement
A large crowd was milling
And in alarm
Gazing up at the building:
There on the top floor
With arms open wide
Begging for help
In despair
Was a child.

Wasting no time
The young lad who was passing
Jumped from the tram
And
Across the way dashing,
Dodging a lorry,
A car and a van,
Shinned up a drainpipe
That by the wall ran.

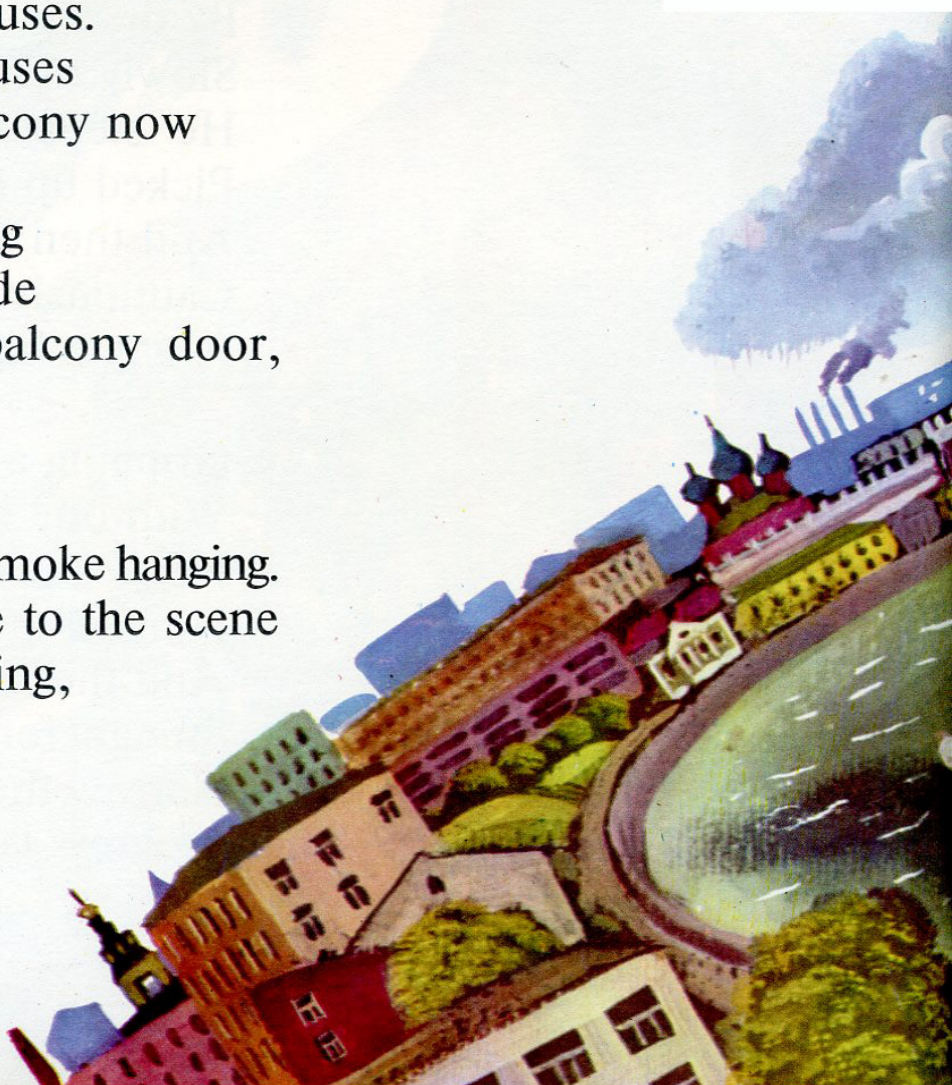
Reaching the third floor,
The fourth and fifth
Quickly,
Soon he was there
Where the smoke billowed
Thickly.
Clouds of black smoke
From the high window poured.
Flames licked the sill
And the mighty blaze roared.

Holding on fast
By the tip of each finger
Slowly but surely
He stepped to the window,
Picked up the child
And then started to edge
Cautiously forward
Along a high ledge.

Gripping a pillar
With one hand
He steadied
Himself
And then
Straight for a balcony headed...
Narrow the ledge is here,
Progress is slow.

Now there remain
Only four steps
To go.
Crowds on the pavement
Are anxiously staring,
Noting his caution
And praising his daring...
Two steps he's taken,
He's now
Halfway there.
Two steps remain
And he has to take care.
One step. He pauses.
Another. He pauses
Close to the balcony now
But exhausted.
Taking the railing
In one giant stride
He opens the balcony door,
Goes inside...

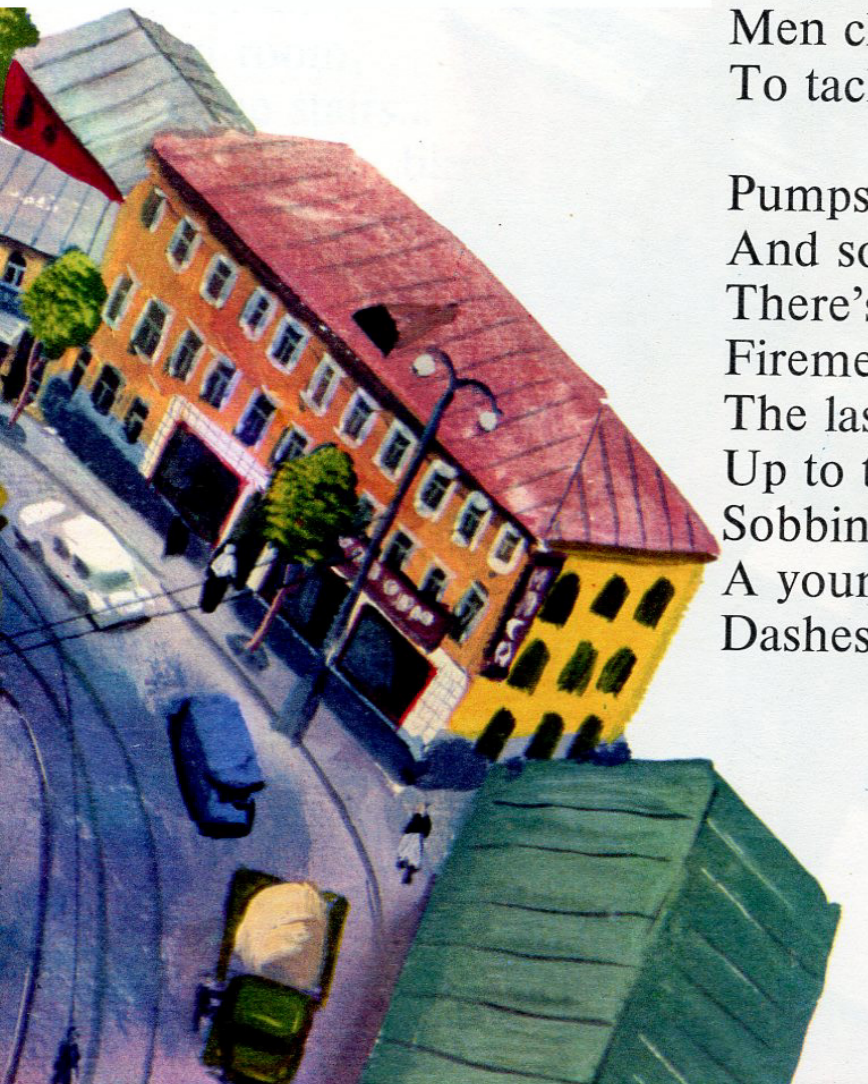
Over the house
There's a pall of smoke hanging.
Fire engines race to the scene
With bells clanging,



Hoses rolled neatly
And taps gleaming bright,
Rows of brass helmets
A glittering sight.

This way and that way
The brass helmets scatter.
As in a fairy tale
Up shoots a ladder.
Tarpaulin-clad
As their duties
Require
Men climb the ladders
To tackle the fire...

Pumps throb
And soon
There's a reek of hot ashes.
Firemen play hoses
The last flames to douse.
Up to them
Sobbing
A young woman
Dashes:



"Help me!
My daughter...
She's trapped
In the house!"

"Nobody's there,"
Say the firemen.
"We're willing
To help you, of course,
But we've searched the whole
building,
Checked
Every attic
And room,
All the stairs...
The whole block is empty.
There's nobody there!"
Through the yard gate
At that moment
The stranger
Came into view
Now at last
Out of danger.

Б. ПОЛЯНКА
31501

Covered in bruises
The lad with strong arms
Carried the girl
To her mother
Unharmed.

Hugging her mother
The child began weeping...
Meanwhile the lad
On a passing tram leaping
Waved his white cap
To the crowd looking on
And, as the tram turned a corner,
Was gone...

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So many fellows there are
Broad and sturdy,
All wearing white caps
And light summer jerseys.
So many fellows
With badges
You'll meet–
All fit
And ready
To do a brave feat!

Drawings by Vassili Shulzhenko
Translated from the Russian by *Peter Tempest*

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С. Маршак

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